

Administration of Joseph R. Biden, Jr., 2023

Remarks on the Resignation of Ronald A. Klain and the Appointment of Jeffrey D. Zients as White House Chief of Staff

February 1, 2023

Whoa! Hello, everyone. I want—please, have a seat if you have one. *[Laughter]*

I want to—for the press, I want to put an end to the rumors that the rest of the staff has not quit because he's leaving. *[Laughter]* I want you to know that.

I knew this day would come, to state the obvious, but it doesn't make it any easier. You know, I've known Ron since he was a kid, you know, a third-year law student in a school near Boston. What was that school's name? *[Laughter]*

[At this point, the President briefly imitated a Boston accent.]

Harvard, I think.

And he came to work with me in the United States Senate on the Senate Judiciary Committee a week after he got married. And he married a woman even brighter. Stand up—*[inaudible]*.

She—the only reason he came down: She was a third-year law student at Georgetown, and he decided to do his third year—he still graduated from Harvard at the top of his class, but he decided to do his third year at Georgetown. And that's when I—he was working full time as a student and working full time with me.

I knew the moment he started, he was a once-in-a-generation talent. And that's not hyperbole. He's a fiercely brilliant intellect. And again, those of you who work with him know it to be true. And just as important, he has a heart as big as his head. *[Laughter]*

You know—thank you, Ron and Monica, and Hannah and Mike and Danny. You know, you're like family. And folks who've been with me a long time know it's hard to get away from us—*[laughter]*—even when you leave.

Speaking of family, there's one member of the family who couldn't be here: Ron's mom.

Mom, if you can see this or it gets played for you, we love you. We really do. All of us love you, and we're thinking a lot about you. You raised one heck of a son. And you should be so proud. Ron is a credit to you, Mom.

And Ron couldn't have chosen—could have done anything he wanted to do in life, but he chose to serve his country. He chose to serve his country. And the whole family, the whole Klain family made sacrifices in order for him to be able to do that public service. And they're in the front row here. And, I mean, you really did. And I want to thank all of you—all of you—for letting your dad do what he's done, as long as he has, with me.

For the last 36 years, Ron has been at my side in one capacity or another. And there's been some very tough and real battles we've been in together. And when you're in the trenches with somebody, you—figure out pretty quickly what they're made of. You get to know the person pretty damn well.

And you see everything about them that—when they—how they act under significant pressure and how—and this guy—there's a phrase in the neighborhood I come from: He's willing to jump in front of the bus for you. This is a guy who has always been there, you know.

And so I knew, as we faced our most important battle—the battle for the soul of the Nation—that I needed Ron. And that's not hyperbole. I needed Ron, and I knew it. And I asked him. I asked him whether he would lead the charge for me. And you know, he did. And he knows how Government works, how politics works, and how Congress and the White House works. But most of all, he has enormous, enormous integrity.

He assembled the most diverse and most talented White House team in history and led them to solve some of the really difficult problems. With Ron's leadership, just look at what we've gotten here over the years—over the last 2 years alone: fighting COVID, reviving our economy, rebuilding the infrastructure, protecting our planet, fighting for gun—fighting against gun violence, advancing civil rights, winning confirmation of nearly 100 Federal judges, including the first Black Supreme Court Justice in history.

And playing a major role in reasserting America's place in the world. Maybe most important of all, helping restore faith in our democracy. The list will be the—the legacy of the White House team under Ron's leadership.

And while we've accomplished an extraordinary amount of work marked—a consequence of Ron's success, he is beloved by those of you here in the White House, as demonstrated by this crowd here. And you know, as I said earlier, there's a lot of Klainiacs in this room. *[Laughter]* They're going to miss him, but not as much as I will.

And that's why I knew it was important to fill Ron's shoes with someone who understands—who understands—what it takes to lead a team and who is focused on getting important things done. And that's Jeff Zients right here.

And Jeff—*[applause]*. I've seen Jeff tackle some of the toughest issues in our Government. When I was Vice President, I first got to know him. We worked together and implemented the Recovery Act of 2009. And later, he was Director of the Office of Management and Budget.

He later led the daunting and complicated task of fixing healthcare.gov—*[laughter]*—to get millions of Americans signed up for quality and affordable health care under the Affordable Care Act. And he led the National Economic Council, and he shares my determination to build an economy that works for everyone, works from the bottom up and the middle out. And—because when that happens, everybody does well.

After the 2020 election, some of you know my—one of my closest friends in the world, Ted Kaufman, who was my administrative assistant, then became—took my place in the Senate. He helped Ted manage our transition and into office in incredibly trying circumstances. And he did the work.

Thanks to Jeff, we had a historically diverse team from day one, and we were ready to get to work. And he led our COVID response, a massive logistical undertaking of historical proportions, and so much more.

When I ran for office, I promised to make the Government work for the American people. And that's what Jeff does. It's a big task ahead—is to implement the laws we've gotten passed efficiently and effectively and fairly and let people know what we've already done. We've made a lot of progress, but we have to build on that project. And if anyone is going to be able to build on that job, it's Jeff.

I wanted to thank Jeff and Mary. Mary—where's Mary? There you are, Mary. And their wonderful family. Will the whole Zients family stand up? Come on. Come on, Mom.

You guys, what you have to know is—you know, when you're a family of someone running the White House, you've got to be embarrassed and—you know, I've got to embarrass you all the

time and introduce you. *[Laughter]* But it's because we're proud of him. And thank you. I know this doesn't happen without the cooperation of the whole family. I mean that sincerely.

Now, let me close with this. When you're President of the United States and you've got to make some pretty tough calls and to make—decisions you make are only as good as the team you put around you. And I have an extremely lucky—I've been extremely lucky and grateful to have such a team who's led by Ron.

And I'm confident Jeff is going to continue Ron's example of smart and steady leadership on behalf of the American people.

And now it's my great pleasure—and I don't get to do this often—to turn this over to Ron to publicly speak in front of everybody. *[Laughter]*

Ladies and gentlemen, Ron Klain.

NOTE: The President spoke at 5:27 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Monica P. Medina, wife of outgoing Chief of Staff Klain, and their children Hannah, Michael, and Daniel; Sarann Warner, mother of Chief of Staff Klain; Supreme Court Associate Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson; and Mary Menell Zients, wife, and Debbie Zients, mother, of incoming Chief of Staff Zients. The transcript was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on February 2.

Categories: Appointments and Nominations : White House Chief of Staff, appointment, remarks; Resignations and Retirements : White House Chief of Staff, resignation, remarks.

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